



## separation anxiety

sometimes children express fears when they need to separate from you. these fears are often developmentally appropriate. other times, this anxiety may be cause for concern.

### **developmental separation anxiety:**

- typically begins around 6 months with the onset of crawling. some babies become clingy when they realize they are separate from you.
- is related to the development of object permanence, when infants learn that people continue to exist even when they can't see them.
- can intensify from 12-18 months, when babies begin walking and can move away from you, but aren't emotionally ready to handle the separation.

### **things you can do to minimize developmental separation anxiety:**

- gradually build on the amount of time your child spends with other caregivers.
- prepare your child before entering a new situation by helping him know what to expect (e.g., by reading books or drawing pictures).
- when possible, visit a new setting in advance.
- acknowledge your child's fears, while encouraging him to recall past times when he was worried, but acted brave. remind him that those situations turned out ok. never deny or joke about your child's fears, or tell him that he should "get over it."
- give your child time to size up strangers and read your reaction to them. she'll be looking to you for cues on how to react. if the stranger is ok to you, he'll be ok to her.
- don't sneak out without saying goodbye. let your child see you go, and establish a routine with him when you do (e.g., say something similar each time you leave, like "mommy's going out, but i'll be back soon!") your child will become more upset if he feels like you just disappeared.
- once you leave, leave. try not to return, even if you've forgotten something. it will be much harder on your child to have to deal with the upset of you leaving all over again.
- establish a bedtime routine, which will help your child ease into sleep.



### **when is separation anxiety a problem?**

- if your child's anxiety interferes with learning, having fun, making friends, keeping friends or enjoying friends.
- if the anxiety is causing your child extreme distress.
- if your child cannot calm down after two weeks.

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**call.** 212 966 7273

**write.** [info@seedlingsgroup.com](mailto:info@seedlingsgroup.com)

**visit.** [www.seedlingsgroup.com](http://www.seedlingsgroup.com)